"The Need to Know:
Information Sharing Lessons for Disaster Response"

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House Committee on Government Reform Hearing
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Good morning Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the Committee. My name is John Brennan, and I am currently President and CEO of The Analysis Corporation of McLean, Virginia that provides analytic and technical support to the national counterterrorism community. It is a pleasure to appear before you today to address issues related to information sharing and situational awareness during the management of an emergency. The views I offer today are my own. They are informed by 25 years of experience as a CIA official as well as by my tenure as head of the Terrorist Threat Integration Center and of its successor organization the National Counterterrorism Center.

The term "information sharing" has become one of the most frequently used phrases in government since the devastating terrorist attacks that occurred on 11 September 2001. Members of Congress as well as senior officials in the Executive Branch have railed against the lack of sufficient sharing of critical information among government agencies. The problem has been attributed, at various time, to institutional stovepipes, bureaucratic malaise, turf battles among agencies, excessive security requirements, mismanagement of IT resources and budgets, and a lack of strong and visionary leadership. I do not disagree that these factors have played a role in preventing the flow of relevant information in a timely fashion to departments, agencies, and individuals in need of such information.

But these factors have been allowed to flourish because of a much more fundamental systemic problem that afflicts our government and our nation in dealing with matters such as terrorism, hurricanes, a potential Avian Flu Pandemic, or other challenges that may be on the horizon. The systemic problem is the absence of a coherent national framework that integrates and delineates roles and responsibilities on issues of major significance. Such a framework is the essential prerequisite to an effective information-sharing regimen that optimizes the formidable capabilities, knowledge, and expertise that are available in federal, state, and local governments as well as in the private sector.

Let me explain. The purpose of sharing information is to ensure that individuals, departments, and organizations are able, in a timely fashion, to take some action or to perform some function for which they are responsible. Such actions and functions include warning and notification; protection and security; analysis and forecasting; rescue and recovery; policy decision-making; preparedness; and consequence management; just to name a few. The challenge for information providers, however, is that these diverse

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responsibilities are shared by many and are scattered across federal, state, and local jurisdictions.

In the absence of an overarching framework, or "business architecture," that effectively integrates and articulates these responsibilities, the collectors, knowers, and stewards of relevant information are forced to make presumptive judgments about "who" needs access to "what." Similarly, the wanters of information are unsure to whom and to where they should look for information that addresses their needs. Confusion on both sides of the information divide has stymied the development of a symbiotic and synergistic relationship between information providers and users.

Unfortunately, it will take our nation many years to adapt outdated 20th Century institutions, governance structures, and day-to-day business processes so that we may more effectively meet the challenges of the 21st Century. In the meantime, and based on my experience setting up counterterrorism organizations and information-sharing practices across the Federal Government, I strongly recommend the establishment of a common information-sharing and access environment that can be utilized by the providers and users of natural disaster information—whether they be federal, state, or local officials; law enforcement agencies; the private sector; or U.S. persons seeking information so that they can make appropriate decisions for themselves and for their families.

Specifically, I recommend the establishment of web-based portal on the Internet that would serve as a "National Hurricane Information Center." Administered by the Federal Government, the portal would allow authorized information providers to post information and enable users to self-select information they need. Such a portal could serve as a one-stop shopping data mart containing virtually limitless archived and new information related to hurricanes, such as emergency contact information, weather reports, maps, first responder directories, hospital and health care providers, casualty and damage information, critical needs relief providers, security bulletins, shelter locations, and other relevant matters. Information could be organized and searched according to functional topics, geographic regions, or chronologically.

The portal could be constructed in a very flexible and versatile manner. In addition to providing general information to anyone who logs on as well as password-protected proprietary information accessible only to authorized users, the portal could serve as a communication mechanism among communities of interest, such as first responders. Unlike in the Intelligence Community, where complicated security requirements and multiple classified information networks inhibit the creation of a shared information-sharing environment, natural disaster information is not so encumbered. Thus, the ubiquity and robustness of the Internet makes it the ideal information-sharing and information-access platform for the nation.

While the Federal Government would design and maintain the portal, there would need to be shared responsibility for posting, managing, and updating the content according to an agreed-upon business framework. The Federal Government also would have the

responsibility for ensuring the portal's availability during emergencies and periods of peak activity and for the deployment of back-up systems when infrastructure is damaged. While this portal would not take the place of established information technology networks that serve as command and control mechanisms for individual departments and agencies, the portal would serve as a shared, collaborative information-sharing and information-access environment transcending individual entities.

Our nation faces numerous challenges in the years ahead. In my view, confronting those challenges successfully hinges squarely on the Federal Government's ability to integrate capabilities and to leverage technology in an unprecedented manner within a national framework.

I look forward to responding to your questions.